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[My Victim Advocate Training Experience](#)

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By Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Jacquelyn D. Childs



Petty Officer 1st Class Jacquelyn D. Childs

Like any Sailor, I'm always looking for new ways to make myself better, whether personally or

professionally. I don't mean to look better on paper, because I realize some people have that intent in their careers. I mean really, truly a better person through growth and professional development.

One interest I had at my last command was getting involved in the sexual assault prevention program. For a few years, I had grown increasingly interested in the idea of helping those during such an emotional time. I know hospital corpsmen inherently have that ability to get to assist others with physical or emotional trauma. But mass communication specialists... not so much. So the idea intrigued me.

I served in a leadership role at the time and had the opportunity to impact Sailors lives in different ways, which was more than fulfilling enough to me at the time. But when I arrived at Navy Medicine Education and Training Command at Joint Base San Antonio – Fort Sam Houston, Texas, a year and a half ago, I knew it was the perfect opportunity to step up and volunteer as a victim advocate.

Due to timing with other trainings I was required to attend and the fact that the base SAPR office only held their training quarterly, I had to wait several months to attend the sexual assault prevention victims advocate training. I finally had the opportunity in early January to go to the week-long course necessary to become a certified DoD victim advocate. After submitting all my paperwork, I showed up to the first day of training happy to be wearing civilian attire for a few days and eager to learn. Despite all the prior training I've had required by the Navy, I was still blown away by this training and how much of an impact it had on me.

This training was extremely heavy and we heard countless real-life case examples from our victims advocate, Ms. Seletha Willis, and others who came to speak to us. It was heart-breaking to hear the horrible things that actually go on in the world. So many feelings built up just during this one week of classroom experience. Anger toward the evil people in the world. Sadness for those negatively impacted. This sadness was even more so for those who did not receive the justice and/or help they needed and deserved during such a difficult time in their lives.

Aside from the stories and a couple films, we went over various resources and actually learned some of the scientific factors of a sexual assault, including tonic immobility, which I found to be a fascinating topic. Tonic immobility is a natural state of paralysis that some animals, including humans, will enter when experiencing certain physical/emotional trauma. I am so amazed at the advancements we've made in better understanding the victims and the experiences they go through. Years ago when a girl didn't fight back, it meant she wanted it. But this, and other aspects of sexual assault are a little more understood, especially in the medical and law enforcement communities. Of course there is still a long way to go as many victims are still discredited or patronized.

I saw firsthand a young woman effected by a sexual assault situation early in my Navy career. She was not supported by our fellow Sailors. That experience, including my reactions at the time and everyone else's, made me really think during this training how difficult it was for her and how terrible it is when victims don't receive the support they need. Just hearing the different stories and watching the movies weighed so heavy on me I could actually feel it later in the day as I was home preparing for bed. It is an eye-opening experience, which I know has (at least somewhat) prepared me to handle a real-life scenario in which I must provide that one non-judgmental, fully-supportive shoulder to lean on for a victim in crisis.

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